

ANNUAL REPORT

OF THE

SIGNAL OFFICER OF THE ARMY

TO THE

SECRETARY OF WAR.

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WASHINGTON, D. C.
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National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

Annual Report of the Chief Signal Officer, U.S. Army Signal Corps

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REPORT.

OFFICE OF THE SIGNAL OFFICER,
Washington, D. C., October 20th, 1865.

HON. E. M. STANTON,
Secretary of War,
Washington, D. C.,

SIR :

In answer to your communication of the 7th inst. I have the honor to submit the following annual report of the operations of the Signal Corps for the year ending October 20, 1865.

Upon the 1st of November, 1864, the Corps was represented in the field by the following detachments, thoroughly equipped, active, and energetic, to wit :

DETACHMENTS.	Officers, Sig- nal Corps.	Acting officers.	Non-commis- sioned officers.	Privates.
Office of the Signal Officer.....	3	2	9
Department of Washington	6	1	5	66
Signal Camp of Instruction.....	16	4	3	86
Army of the Potomac	12	3	13	167
Department of Virginia and North Carolina.....	15	8	14	137
Department of the South.....	7	13	39
Department of the Cumberland.....	9	10	10	87
Department of the Tennessee.....	6	7	7	140
Department of the Ohio	4	4	1	42
Military Division of West Mississippi	10	15	10	210
Department of Kansas	2	5	2	51
Middle Military Division.....	8	8	2	168
Department of the Susquehanna.....	4	1	2	64
Total	102	66	84	1,266
	168		1,350	

Such was the disposition of the Corps, and the following in general terms the nature of services performed:

The duties of the Corps during the past year were better understood than in previous years, which gave to it more tone and character, and enabled it to approximate in most of the military departments to its true position.

In one, the Department of the Gulf, it combined all the branches of the corps of information which it was designed, and of right ought to be. Here it added to aerial telegraphing, telescopic reconnoitering, and general scouting, the entire secret service department, thus having all information usually gathered from other sources flow into one centre, where it was compared, classified, reduced to logical form, and then laid before the Commanding General to be acted upon. The advantage arising from thus concentrating these services is especially apparent in the fact, that particular reports and doubtful information could be thoroughly sifted and tested in two, three, or more different modes by the one officer having control of the several means for collecting knowledge of the enemy's movements and designs.

In other Military Departments, as I have stated, the Corps only approximated to this more perfect system of economy. But, as the value of concentration in military organizations was being daily more and more recognized, these duties, if the war had continued, would have undoubtedly been eventually assigned to the Corps, wherever a detachment would have been placed on duty. In the army of the Potomac our duties were limited to signal communication, observing and reporting the changes and movements of the enemy, and such aid duty as we were called upon to perform.

In the Armies operating under Major General Sherman, the signal detachment added to signaling and telescopic reconnoitering, general scouting, guide, courier, and aid duty.

The detachment in the Department of the South, was limited to keeping communication open between the several military posts along the coast, and between the land and naval forces when operating in conjunction.

Upon the plains a detachment operated with the various expeditions against the Indians, keeping open communication between detached parties and the main body of the Army.

In the Department of Pennsylvania, the signal detachment was employed in watching the crossings of the Potomac, as well as doing general out-post duty, with instructions to give timely information to the Commanding General of any threatening danger, that it might be met upon the threshold of the department, and overcome before any injury could be done to the community.

In the Department of Virginia and North Carolina, in addition to communicating by signals between portions of the Army, and the observing of the movements of the enemy, the detachment was beneficially employed in various expeditions and operations of the Army and Navy combined, connecting the commanders of the two forces so immediately as to make their several efforts harmonize in such manner that their blows fell with double effect upon the strongholds and battalions of the enemy.

The insurrectionary armies having been at the end of the spring campaign forced to surrender, and the power of the Government having been re-established to its rightful extent, the great work of disbanding and returning to the conditions of peace the military force of the United States was commenced.

The Signal Corps of the Army having been organized by an act of Congress, which in some of its provisions had a view to permanency, but gave to the corps only an organization for the term of the rebellion, was, by various orders from the War Department, materially reduced, until all that portion of it on duty east of the Mississippi was mustered out and discharged.

There now remain the detachment in the Military Division of the Mississippi, numbering nine officers, two non-commissioned officers, and thirty-five enlisted men; and the detachment in the Military Division of the Gulf, numbering fifteen officers, thirteen non-commissioned officers, and eighty-six enlisted men. These detachments are operating with the troops upon the plains, and throughout Texas, and along the southwestern boundary.

OFFICE OF THE SIGNAL OFFICER.

The office of the Signal Officer is three-fold in its character.

It is, first, the headquarters of the Corps, where the records are collected, completed and filed, and has advisory superintendence and control of the special duties of the Corps, and all assignments of officers and men to signal duty; second, a purchasing and disbursing office from which supplies of signal stores and equipments are issued to the various detachments of the Corps in the field; third, an office for the examining of the signal accounts and returns of signal stores, of all officers responsible to the Government for such property.

Connected with this office are two clerks of "Class two," to-wit: Messrs Simeon White and Alexander Ashley, appointed in 1863.

To the ability and faithful exertions of these persons is owing much of the degree of system and perfection attained in the records of the office.

EXPENDITURES, &c.

There were expended during the year ending September 30, 1865, of the sums appropriated for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1865, eight thousand five hundred and thirty-seven dollars, and six cents, leaving a balance, which, added to that yet remaining of former appropriations, for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1866, makes the sum of two hundred and forty-eight thousand and sixty-two dollars still available.

SPECIAL SERVICES.

Having thus given a general view of the Corps, its strength, duties, and expenses, I propose, without entering into a detailed statement of the constant and various acts of service performed, which were part and parcel of every battle fought, and campaign made during the year, and which played in each a more or less important function, to merely place upon record, through the War

Department, several instances where the operations of the Corps were of such vital importance that all who read must acknowledge that the Signal Corps was a valuable adjunct to the Army, and rendered such material service in the great contest just closed, that its members can view with pride and infinite self-satisfaction a substantial record, made in the face of the difficulties that usually attend the introduction of a new element into any old established system.

The first instance of the kind referred to, which I shall mention, occurred in October, 1864, and just previous to the commencement of the great campaign of General Sherman from the northern part of Georgia to the sea-coast. That great leader, whose military genius never allowed him to overlook any visible means to aid in securing success, or guard against any, or all, possible occurrences to endanger his plans, in whatever enterprise undertaken, seeing the liabilities of his telegraph wires, communicating with his depot of supplies at Allatoona, being cut, he established, in addition, a line of signal communication, through which he afterwards, when the enemy obtained a lodgment in his rear, and cut his telegraph wires, as was foreseen, transmitted his orders and instructions that saved from capture Allatoona, its garrison, and stores of supplies, the value of which at that time and place cannot be computed, as, without them, it can well be doubted whether the great campaign, which exposed the great weakness of the enemy, and propagated the seeds of the coming dissolution of the rebellion, could have been executed for months later. In connection with this transaction, General Sherman states: "In several instances this Corps (Signal Corps) has transmitted orders and brought me information of the greatest importance that could not have reached me in any other way. I will instance one most remarkable instance. When the enemy had cut our wires, and actually made a lodgment on our railroad about Big Shanty, the signal officers on Vining's Hill, Kenesaw, and Allatoona sent my orders to General Corse at Rome, whereby General Corse was enabled to reach Allatoona just in time to defend it. Had it not been for the services of this Corps on that occasion, I am satisfied we should have lost the garrison at Alla-

toona, and a most valuable depository of provisions there, which was worth to us and the country more than the aggregate expense of the whole Signal Corps for one year."

This will serve to evince the important character of the services of the Corps at times when operating with the Army alone. The following account will demonstrate its eminent usefulness where the Army and Navy operated in conjunction. In the expedition organized to attack Fort Fisher in the month of January of this year an Army signal officer was with Admiral Porter, commanding the fleet, and others with General Terry, commanding the land forces, who, by means of signals, placed these commanding officers in such immediate communication that the fire of the Navy, which otherwise must have slackened after the assault commenced upon the part of the Army, was kept up without cessation, as the enemy was driven from traverse to traverse. In this connection, Admiral Porter, in a communication to the Secretary of the Navy, which induced the latter to tender the thanks of the Navy Department to the War Department for this efficient agency, states: "Through Mr. Clemens, (signal officer) I was in constant communication with General Terry, even during the assault on Fort Fisher, and was enabled to direct the fire of the New Ironsides to the traverses occupied by the enemy, without fear of hurting our own people, from my complete reliance on him." Thus, through this mobile system of visual telegraphing, the Army and Navy are made to act as a unit. During the war there were more forcible instances of this kind than the above; when, in most important crises, it would have been impossible for the Navy to have rendered the necessary assistance, save through the aid of Army signals, by means of which its fire was directed to unseen points with almost as much facility and certainty as could have been done, if the gunners would have had the object of their aim in view.

I would also state here that improvements were made during the year in the simple cipher apparatus used by the Corps, in sending secret messages, which, if they did not absolutely defy deciphering, were of such an intricate and complex character, that messages sent thereby cannot possibly be interpreted by the

uninitiated within such period as to be of any service to the enemy, even should the messages fall into his hands.

With these references to special transactions of the Corps, and having accorded to its members the merit and thanks so well earned by earnest patriotism ; by zealous, faithful, and constant exertion, to render services throughout the war to their country, and by the success achieved ; and having conceded to them the claim that no class of the military was more anxious to be useful or welcomed with more satisfaction, additional duties, we will conclude this report by calling attention to the necessity for additional action in order to afford, in the future, to the Army the requisite Signal Service.

As experience has clearly demonstrated, the eminent advantage of having a signal officer attached to garrisons and posts liable to be besieged, in order to secure communication over the heads of an enemy, should occasion arise, and of having a sufficient number of signal officers as a nucleus, that would be immediately available in the event of future wars, it is submitted that such action should be taken by the authorities as would secure for such contingencies the properly instructed officers. This can be done in two modes : either by continuing a small permanent organization with specifically defined duties ; or by detailing a certain number of officers from other branches of the service, and directing them to report to the Signal Officer of the Army, to be instructed, with a view to their being assigned to such garrisons and posts as it may be deemed necessary to provide with means of signal communication.

If the former mode be adopted, it is recommended that a board of officers, more or less acquainted with the past services of this department, be appointed to report the form of the required organization, and to define, as far as practicable, the specific duties to be assigned it, to avoid in the future the great stumbling block which was left in the way in the past organization, and which, in many instances, crippled the usefulness of the Corps by its not being properly understood what it could do or was expected to do.

It is presumed that no argument need be presented in favor of a new organization, as it is self-evident greater interest would be taken in the service, and greater perfection attained in it than in a simply acting Corps.

I have the honor, sir, to be, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

B. F. FISHER,
Chief Signal Officer, and Colonel U. S. A.

Through

Brig. General E. D. TOWNSEND,
Assistant Adjutant General,
War Department,
Washington, D. C.